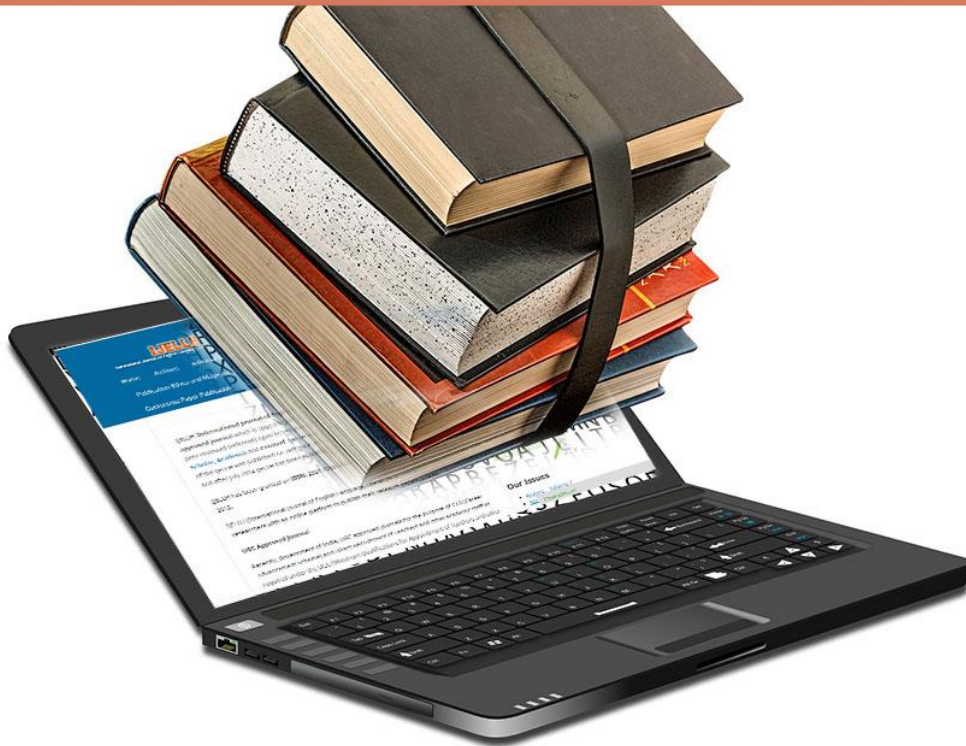


**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
**ISSN-2321-7065**

**IJELLH**

# **International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

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Racial Segregation as a Pre-Eminent Cultural Border in Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior*

## Introduction

This article shapes its underlying principle within the continuing problematic issue of racial Segregation and its bearings in contemporary South African society. This is sustained by the fact that the oppressor, through racial ideology constructed and imposed a prejudiced and stereotypical image of the oppressed. In the complex context of Mda's South Africa there are nuances in the ways in which varied and negative images were conceptualized and disseminated. A peculiarity in this article is the perspectives regarding the non-whites who were entangled in the oppressive epistemologies of Racial Structures and colonialism that limited the economic and social opportunities from the majority. Faced in such circumstances questions of self and identity are negotiated amidst trauma and even loss of sense of being. It also demonstrates how colonial and apartheid regimes maintained racial segregation through their various institutions such as education, religion and others.

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate *The Madonna of Excelsior* a literary reflection of life under apartheid period as well as under a new social order which is post-

apartheid. From this observation, the novel is considered as a satire on the apartheid structure and its inhumanity. It is equally a satire about the black women who give birth to mixed-race children throughout the apartheid regime. The novel is a critique on the wayward attitude of the Boer men who are interested in raping black women.

If the racial structures that have entrenched patterns of access to economic opportunities remain static they will not allow inclusion of previously excluded groups. This paper's contribution lies in the fact that focal changes are necessary to open the economy and adjust the racial composition of South Africa.

Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* can be said to be a poignant description of life in the new South Africa at the backdrop of the legacies of the now collapsed apartheid period. The novel's point of departure is based on the Immorality Act of the apartheid era which forbade sexual relationships between Blacks and Whites even though the policy could not totally stop that from happening as villages in South Africa were full of children of mixed races. In fact, the novel is revolving around Niki and her children especially Popi who is a victim of the infamous Immorality Act and her role in the post-apartheid South Africa as she tries to unite all South Africans through reconciliation.

The understanding element in *The Madonna of Excelsior* is that the transcendent of manmade borders is a process of cultural contacts of the various groups in such a society. Such contacts enable them to reduce dissenting views as a means of achieving cultural transformation. In this article I hold that the collective voice in the novel reveals how the cultural borders set down during the apartheid era can be transcended through cultural contacts between the different factions.

Valerie Sayers in "Commonwealth" thinks that the novel is based on a fact that took place during the apartheid period of 1971 when interracial sexual relationships were forbidden by law. From this premise Sayers points out that this single event in the novel

has important ramification as the central character's mixed-race daughter and black son unite and liberate South Africa from the local base.

Bronislaw Malinowski and Isidore Okpewho both uphold that any meaningful literature needs to be done on the backdrop of the author's society and background. Like these two authors, Leonard Thompson holds that:

[...] the territory today known as South Africa was first inhabited by two groups of people known as the Khoikhoi and the San who had a similar language—Khoisan. Their only neighbours were the Bantu tribe of the North East ( p. 328).

The National party's victory introduced laws to bolster the existing racial segregation and give it an official structure. During this period, laws regulating personal contacts between the races appeared quickly. The Mixed Marriage Act of 1949 extended the prohibition of marriage between whites and Africans to include coloureds and Indians, and the Immorality Act of 1950 likewise extended the prohibition of sexual intercourse between people of different groups. In 1950 the government introduced the first two laws, which were to form the corner stone of grand apartheid. It is against this background that we examine Niki's situation which came about as a result of the political situation in South Africa at the time.

Popi's coloured status is in itself a source of insecurity. This is due to the concept of miscegenation. She considers herself, not only illegitimate, but inferior. Thus, she literally does not know who she is and belongs nowhere. Nelson Mandela in his book *Long Walk to Freedom* further intimates that:

The prohibition of mixed marriage Act was introduced in 1949. The immorality Act closely followed this rapid succession. These Acts outlawed sexual relations between the whites and non-whites. Any form of amorous

relationship between the whites and the non-whites was considered illegal. The goal here was to preserve the purity of the white race (P. 130).

The non-white race was generally looked upon as inferior, filthy and contaminated. This was a situation of Africans in the racist's world of the whites where white men could be excused for sleeping with black women but a white woman was never forgiven for sleeping with a black.

The prohibition of mixed marriage Act was introduced in 1949 as a result, whites saw themselves as superior and thus, should not have anything in common with the blacks. Marriage between whites and blacks was therefore outlawed. The goal here was to preserve the purity of the white race. Mda presents the same situation in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, where by a white is not suppose to get married to a black. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda depicts the case of nineteen black women who are charged in court for violating the Immorality Act. Mda brings out South African history through the two families both from different sides of the racial divide. He portrays some of the realities that made up the dark days of apartheid in South Africa though now history but what still remains is the damage which this past has caused to the society and its members.

During the days of apartheid, so many regulations restricted and deprived black South Africans in every aspect of human life. White South Africans enjoyed certain privileges that they did not deserve but were got as a result of their birth. These privileges were denied blacks through a diabolic policy of racism. In *Long Walk to Freedom* Nelson Mandela underscores the far reaching effects of racial prohibition:

Banning not only confines one physically, it imprisons one's spirit. It induces a kind of psychological claustrophobia that makes one yearn for not only freedom of movement, but spiritual escape. Banning was a dangerous game

for, one was not shackled or chained behind bars; the bars were laws and regulations that could easily be violated (P. 166).

From the foregoing analysis, the South African society was largely oppressive because human equality was absent and human relationship was rather marked by apathy than by sympathy. It is out of this irrational world that Mda seeks to create an ideal world where everyone has a place and people are treated on equal basis.

The Immorality Act is one of the repressive laws of the apartheid regime. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda makes an allusion to the historical event that took place in the 1970's in South Africa where a group of black women and white men were tried under the Immorality Act. These Black women and white men were arrested for violating the Immorality Act. This incident is portrayed in the novel through the following episode:

We saw the White men arriving [...] Five white men, charge with indulging in stolen pleasures. They were all on bail [...] while their partners in crime remained incarcerated in the fester that was Winburg police cells[...] First to arrive was Johannes Smit [...]. Among all the Afrikaners of Excelsior, we knew him as an openly lecherous man. [...] Then followed by Groot-Jan Lombard [...] The Reverend François Bornman was the last to arrive [...] We knew of him as a man of God who preached obedience to his laws. Laws against adultery and miscegenation [...] The accused women were led into the courtroom. Fourteen black women, twelve with babies in their arms (PP.73-77).

The law against sexual relation between whites and blacks as well as miscegenation is another of apartheid's repressive laws. In *Excelsior*, this law which is upheld by the guarantors of the apartheid state like Groot-Jan Lombard, Johannes Smit, Stephanus Cronje and Reverend François Bornman ironically makes them its first victims. Mda x-rays the acts of these white men as a poignant criticism of the whole apartheid regime. The

damage which this trial does to the government's reputation can be considered as one of the numerous consequences especially when the narrator holds that the international media from London (BBC) and New York gather information about the trial and expose the controversy that makes up this law. The narrator equally tells us that there were many strangers in Excelsior magistrate court than the people of Excelsior. These strangers he says were from "New York, England and Johannesburg with cameras and notebooks. Taking notes, asking questions and taking pictures of Excelsior and sending them directly to the "living rooms of England and America" (Mda, 2002, p. 71). During this incident, busy bodies spread the shame of Excelsior to the whole world. This can be noticed when the narrator reechoes a BBC reporter who observes that:

"Excelsior has become the best-known town in the world this week," said the BBC man talking into the microphone [...] "The small farming community – population seven hundred—was rocked a few weeks ago when some of its prominent citizens were arrested with their black maids for contravening Immorality Act. The white accused include the secretary of the local branch of the National Party and some wealthiest farmers in the district. Mr. Adam de Vries is the lawyer representing the white men." (P. 72).

This report can be considered as a vivid criticism of apartheid as it points out the irony in the law since representatives of the party that exerts the law are some of the accused. This is an attempt by the journalist as well as the narrator to expose the baselessness of the law. This incident intimates that the system of apartheid which historically started in 1948 has been sustained by the Afrikaners through breeding prejudice that guides the way whites perceive blacks. And such prejudice is bred and sustained in all aspects of life especially in the council as is the case with the attitude of Tjaart Cronje in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. This form of humiliation Niki undergoes in

the hands of Cornelia Cronje ties in with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view about the outcome of racism in *The Ideology of Racism* that:

One of the worst effect of racism is the way it numbs sensibility. Horrendous things can be done to a section of the population with other sections registering the horrors because their feelings have been numbed to a point where they are unable to see, or hear, what is in front of their eyes and ears (P.121).

According to Ngugi, racism is a destructive force in society since it blinds those who practice it to whatever damage their act seems to do to the victims of their hatred. This is because to the racists, their victims are considered as objects by virtue of their race. In other words, the racists are consumed by hatred to the point where they do not pause to think of their victims as human beings. This is the case with Cornelia Cronje who abuses Niki without pausing to reflect on her actions since what matters to her is the show of power which is engendered by hatred of a black race. Many literary critics postulate that literature cannot exist without history since history deals with human beings. This idea is shared by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Homecoming*, wherein he declares that:

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. Literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political or economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships (P. xv-xvi).

The committed nature of any work of art is reflected in its relationship with history. The priority of the African writer is to talk about the preoccupation of his society. This perception is corroborated by Achebe's view on African literature in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* who declares that:



An African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (P. 78).

This is a very apt image that dismisses the case for the non-involvement of art for art's sake approach to the writing of literature. It seems Mda is of this perception that is why he reflects on the relevance of history in his selected texts under study. *The Heart of Redness* is built on the historical incident of cattle killing and grain destruction that took place in the mid nineteenth century in South Africa. *She Plays with the Darkness* is built on the historical event of the period during the end of apartheid and *The Madonna of Excelsior* is the story of the Immorality Act in South Africa. Apartheid has strongly marked the history of South Africa and it is difficult for the South Africans to forget it. This becomes a pillar for the construction of the future as Ngugi puts it in *Homecoming*, that: The evolution of human culture through the ages, society in motion through time and space is of great importance. For what has been especially for the vast majority of submerged exploited masses in Africa, Asia and the black America, is intimately bound up with what might be our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life and human potential, has roots in our experiences in the past (P. 39).

Whites like Tjaart Cronje still adheres to the racial attitudes. His racist's attitude is portrayed in *The Madonna of Excelsior* when he tells Lizette de Vries that he could not get a promotion in the army because a black was promoted:

“[...] Didn't I leave the army because it was absorbing terrorists into the ranks?

The very people I had been taught were enemy of the Afrikaner race?” “I worked hard in that army. I deserved a promotion. But did I get it? No! Instead

a black terrorist was promoted. I couldn't stay in an affirmative action army and salute an affirmative action general [...] And now the Broederbond has handed this country over to the communists on a silver platter." (PP. 171-173).

The implication here is that when Tjaart Cronje refuses to salute an affirmative action general, this actually means that he does not want to acknowledge the South African society built on reconciliation. But his action is ironical because he is part of the joint white and black controlled council where he even contests the post of the mayor of Excelsior despite his hatred for blacks. This is a discrepancy in his attitude because despite his hatred for the new government he still wants to be mayor in a council where the policy of the former is bound to affect the way he would want to rule his municipality. Cronje's attitude can be likened to what Dennis Walder's quoted by Attridge and Jolly in *Spinning out the Present: Narrative, Gender and the Politics of South African Theatre* refer to as: Forging a new nation gives the necessary illusion of inclusiveness, but it is an illusion not a reality, the euphoria generated by the radical changes which have over taken South Africa should not blind anybody to the problems inherent in the decolonisation process (PP. 206).

This, therefore, implies that the total unity of new South African society is a process that is flawed by problems some of which are residues of the past like in this case where Popi says:

Tjaart Cronje always found a way of linking any issue that arose in the council to the marginalisation of the Afrikaans language. "[...] It is true that the Afrikaner is still fighting the Anglo-Boer war," Popi said, laughing. [...] His problem with the English is a problem with the English. [...]. He is prepared to accept Sesotho even though it is a black language and he hates black people!

[...] He sees it as another victory of the English over his people in the ongoing Anglo-Boer War saga that has lasted for a hundred years (PP. 188-189).

The above insinuation shows that the new society is still rife with racial tension. By implication this can be considered as an outright inability to accept the change that has transformed South Africa. The barriers that apartheid placed on the relationship between blacks and whites seem to condition the lives of blacks and whites in the new South Africa. Tjaart Cronje's view about the new South Africa shows his unwillingness to accept the new political climate in the country when blacks are elected to power.

To Tjaart Cronje, the blacks do not have the capacity to rule South Africa. In concrete terms, their deep-rooted racist attitude is noticed during a banquet at Reverend François Bornman's house. During this banquet Reverend François makes an allusion to Oupa Groot-Jan Lombard who had died eighteen months ago as a result of a health failure which he developed before the Excelsior Nineteen case. Tjaart Cronje acknowledges that he was a true hero of the Afrikaner people that is why his name was read every Sunday outside the church as one of those who led the Great Trek commemoration of 1938. But today it is different. That is why Tjaart Cronje angrily remarks that:

"We are releasing communist from jail," said Tjaart Cronje standing his ground.

"We are allowing terrorists to come back into the country. We are now negotiating with them to be part of our government. Things are happening today that are inconceivable." [...] "But how can the blacks share power with the white man in our own country?" asked Tjaart Cronje. "What does a black person know about power?" All he knows is how to burn down schools. Look what is happening in their location here in Excelsior. They have forced out the Bantu councilors (PP. 148-149).

Tjaart Cronje's negative view about blacks in *The Madonna of Excelsior* seems to put to question the foundation of a rainbow nation. This is because he is controlled by a certain degree of racial superiority which leads him to view the blacks as inferior. In line with Mda, William Thompson in *History of South Africa* says:

In South Africa race is always equated with skin pigmentation and the people of different colour, specific characteristics are often attached by whites. So for instance Africans (blacks), are said to be slow, lazy and smelly (P. 402).

It is difficult for the new leadership to fully realise its vision of a united South Africa due to the presence of vestiges of the apartheid era. The actions of some whites like Tjaart Cronje are a stumbling block to this process. Cronje is still stuck to the binaries of the old South Africa. That is why he does not seem to see any positive view about the new South Africa. To him South Africa is no longer a safe place for the whites because the new government's accession to power has destroyed the order which apartheid imposed on the society. Cronje's negative impression of blacks is certainly controlled by a certain degree of racial superiority which leads him to see blacks as inferior thereby putting into question the idea of non-racial society which is the corner stone of the new political order. His action attests to Desmond Tutu's view that:

Much of post-apartheid life is conditioned by apartheid legacy since the system had entrenched itself as firmly in the South African way of life that it would take a magician to eradicate it with the single wad of a magic stick (P. 17).

Tjaart's negative view about the new South Africa shows his unwillingness to accept the new political climate in the country, especially when he is replaced by a Blackman in the army. This action by the government is a way of bringing the blacks to the centre of political life in the country. Tjaart may be likened to Dalton's friends in *The Heart of*

Redness who do not want to show remorse and ask for forgiveness in the new dispensation.

We sit in with O'Reilly who says:

In fact, Cronje's view can be observed as a remiscence of O'Reilly's view on the issue of self and the other when he says. The concept of the other is central to the thinking about the colonial and postcolonial writing. For Saïd, Orientalist discourse was characterised by a positioning of the colonial peoples and places as others in the sense of alien, non Western and therefore inferior (P. 106).

Most of the story in *The Madonna of Excelsior* revolves around the racial conflicts between whites and blacks in the post-apartheid South Africa. For example, when Tjaart Cronje hears that Johannes Smith has joined Adam de Vries in the Excelsior Development scheme, he feels embarrassed. This makes him to fall sick and he is rushed to the hospital. Tjaart Cronje's attitude portrays that whites are still very reluctant to accord equal rights to blacks despite the change in the country. This proves that tension still exists between the two races even though, officially, they have been reconciled. This sort of drawback in the process of the quest for self may be linked to Mandela's claim in *Long Walk to Freedom* that "The hardest and most complex task for the African National Congress was to build solidarity across the racial and tribal divides that had been classified and institutionalised by the apartheid state" (P.123). Nelson Mandela here explores the relationship between whites and blacks in the newly transformed South African society. In effect he portrays the relationship between whites and blacks in the post-apartheid South Africa that is characterised by racism. Despite these obstacles, South Africans are determined to break away from the moves of apartheid and its past and recreate a new South Africa.

In South Africa, blacks were not allowed to mingle with whites in trains, buses, night clubs, hospitals and schools even at times in churches. The two groups used the social

amenities differently just as they lived differently whereas those of the blacks were often in squalor. This situation was made clear in the 1923 Native Urban Area Act that segregated the blacks from the whites in towns. 1956 parliament passed a legislation prohibiting the blacks from attending church services in white areas. They were employed to clean them but not allowed to pray in them. Mix marriages between races were banned in 1949 and the Immorality Act prohibiting sexual intercourse between blacks and whites. It was the Blackman who suffered most if he or she was caught involved in love with a white man or a white woman. This is what happens with the black women in *The Madonna of Excelsior* who are charged with the violation of the Immorality Act and are locked up in police cells while the white men only suffer humiliation.

While Viliki stands for the African resistance, Tjaart Cronje is portrayed as a symbol of white government fighting to destroy the resistance. By juxtaposing these two groups that are opposed to each other, the author exposes their ideological difference that is at the root of the conflicts between blacks and whites. This can be seen in the ironic twist with which the narrator describes the response from the white:

It was the duty of heroes like Tjaart Cronje and his comrades in the army to destroy all the communists and terrorists who were bent on destroying the way of life for which the forebears had fought against the native tribes and (most important) against the British. The Afrikaner was fighting to preserve the laws of God, which were codified in South Africa into the set of laws that compromised apartheid. Apartheid was therefore prescribed by the Bible. (P. 129).

We understand here that the whites are afraid to lose their superiority to the blacks whom they have pushed to the periphery. It is ironical that where race was once the

indicator of a person's status in society, a pernicious elitism connected to one's perceived commitment to the struggle is now the deciding factor of status and progress in society.

Despite the fact that white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa voted for blacks and coloured does not mean that white South Africans accepted multiracial society. There is an analogous contradictory desire that characterises the post-apartheid South Africa and there is the impulse to blame the perpetrators of apartheid violence on the other hand:

Johannes Smit [...] has not been socialising more with the likes of Adam de Vries and his wife, given that he believed that they belonged to the group of Afrikaners who has sold the Boers out to the communists. A group that had been misled by one F.W.de Klerk, who had capitulated to one Nelson Mandela as soon as the Afrikaners had elected the said de Klerk, president of South Africa. Johannes Smit kept his distance from such Afrikaners. [...] Occasionally he visited Tjaart Cronje at his house or at the butchery to complain about how the affirmative action people were messing up Excelsior (P. 215).

All over South Africa, similar changes took place by the early 1990s, with South African president F.W. de Klerk ending apartheid and releasing Nelson Mandela from jail but these national changes are treated peripherally. We see how the lives of both black and white people in Excelsior are affected by these changes. Those who lived in the shadows of apartheid respond in two ways: they can neither embrace their past nor rebel against it. F.W. de Klerk was so instrumental in abnegating the apartheid laws and releasing Mandela who eventually became the president of South Africa. Mda uses prescriptive techniques which writers use to expose situations to readers and at the same time suggests means to resolve their problems. He gradually educates them into rebellion and the quest for an egalitarian society where individuals as Martin Luther King say "will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character" (P. 227).

The picture painted about Popi's childhood and youth is dramatic, tragic, fragmentary and traumatic. Children always tell Popi that she is a "Boesman" which means mixed breed or low breed. Because of this she becomes so confused.

[...] she was a source of other people's laughter. When other children saw her in the street, they shouted, "Boesman! Boesman!" And then they ran away laughing. At first she used to cry. [...] She did not deserve to play with other children in the street. She blamed her flowing locks for all her troubles. Perhaps it would be better if her mother shaved her head bald again. Then no one would know that she was different. Although her blue eyes will continue to betray her. [...] she did not want her hair. It was the curse that other children pulled when they were fighting her for being a boesman. (PP. 110-111).

Equally of importance in *The Madonna of Excelsior* is the growth of Niki's children throughout the apartheid period and into the post-apartheid epoch as they struggle to strike a fragile peace with all members of the society. Popi is subjected to unfair treatment from her fellow black playmates because she is considered a Boesman. This makes Popi to isolate herself from her playmates and consequently becomes lonely. Popi's colour status in itself is a source of insecurity. This is due to the concept of miscegenation. Popi's method of coming to terms with snobbery is to retreat from it into the world of silence. The treatment given to her gives her a feeling of hopelessness and dejection. This situation also mirrors the lives of millions of South Africans who pass through these same experiences. The treatment Popi undergoes in the hands of her playmates ties with what Margaret Cadmore Junior goes through in Bessie Head's *Maru*. Margaret is despised by her classmates because she is a Masarwa. We hear from the narrator that:

She was that kind of child who was shyly pinched under the seat, and next to whom no one wanted to sit. [...] What did it really mean when another



child walked up to her looking so angry and said “you are just a Bushman?” In their minds it meant so much. [...] What was a Bushman supposed to mean? She had no weapons of words or personality only aspects of permanent silence [...] If they caught her in some remote part of the school buildings during the play time hour, they would set up the wild, jiggling dance “since when did a Bushy go to school?” (P. 171).

In this society, the Botswana people consider themselves just a little less than God and rate all Masarwas as inferiors. Margaret’s childhood’s loneliness sows in her the seed of seclusion. This extends right up to the period when she is finally posted to Dilepe village as a teacher. In Maru, Bushmen are seen as less human. The narrator tells the reader early in part one that “Bushmen and Zebras are more alike in the eyes of non-Bushmen than are Bushmen and humans” (P. 7). She equally generalises that any group which looks different can become “monsters” (P. 7) to another. But the distinction goes beyond appearance and behaviour

For the children at the mission school, that behaviour apparently included three concerns “the wild juggling dance”, living in the bush, and eating mealie pap (Bessie, 1971, p. 13). So she claims that the future of the Masarwa is in peril because the only place they were accepted besides the bush presumably was “as slaves and down trodden dogs of the Botswana”. Margaret undergoes racial discrimination and racial prejudice because of her tribe. This same situation prevailed in South Africa during the apartheid regime in which blacks were subjugated to a similar treatment.

Mda’s novel *The Madonna of Excelsior* revolves around Niki and her children, especially Popi who is a victim of the infamous Immorality Act and her role in post-apartheid South Africa as she tries to unite all South Africans through reconciliation.

When Popi undergoes psychological alienation, which occurs because of a split in her personality she escapes the realistic external environment and seeks refuge within the illusory psychic world. Popi's childhood leads her to question this issue of racial discrimination. When she thinks of this she becomes psychologically caged within her being. Popi is called coloured by those who are more polite and those who are rude call her Boesman. Her life transverses the cross over from white apartheid rule to black native African rule but she fits in neither world. Being too black for the apartheid regime and too white for the African society, Popi laments over the issue of colour prejudice. We hear this when she tells Niki that:

“At least as a coloured person I can complain that in the old apartheid days I was not white enough and now in the new dispensation, I am not black enough,” said Popi jokingly. What about you, Niki? You are black enough, but you are none of those who eat. What is your excuse?” (P. 259).

It is the coloured people like Popi who belong to no culture who have the most difficult lives. Popi is too white for the black society in which she tries to live and far too black to be part of the white society, even if she wants to be. The hatred Popi has for Tjaart Cronje makes her to question her identity:

[...] what made Tjaart Cronje think he could just walk to the head of the queue and get service when she had been waiting in the line for almost twenty minutes? Was it because he was Tjaart Cronje? And she was just Popi? Well she has news for him. She was Popi Pule. She too had a surname, even though the familiarity that bred contempt meant that all and sundry just called her Popi. [...] But they were born and bred by people too. They were Niki Pule, Viliki Pule, and Popi Pule. Popi Pule. Stealer of surnames from Cuckolded men! (P. 154).

Popi does not know where she literally belongs because at one time she claims an African identity through her birth but at another time she is forced to examine the significance of her hybrid identity. She cannot identify with her hybrid identity because she knows nothing about it. But at the end of the novel, she quietly accepts her role as an outsider and settles down to enjoy the rhythm of sunrise and sunset in the Mahlatswetsa Location. She decides to reconcile with everyone in the society that is with both blacks and whites.

When we come across her in the novel, she is ashamed of her identity as a Boesman that is why she hides her legs. Her colour status is in itself a source of insecurity. This leads to the concept of miscegenation. Since Popi is ashamed of her colouredness she learns ways of not calling attention to it. She decides to divert the eyes of the curious from her blue eyes, flowing locks and hairy legs by wearing mammoth docks and slacks.

Popi is confronted with adversities because of her colour. She is ashamed of her appearance because she has realised that she has no class and sophistication, which is associated with being fair. The fact that Popi is referred to as a neither nor should be painful to her. Mda clearly criticises the question of racial superiority. To him he finds it unfair to despise someone on grounds of his/her appearance. The immense power of racism by which societies are rigidly and hierarchically compartmentalised is analysed by Mda as being unjust. He therefore advocates for a society in which people will be judged by the content of their character and not by the basis of their appearance. In *The Madonna of Excelsior* Mda advocates for what Peter Abrahams describes in *Mine Boy* as “Man without Colour”. He advocates for a world where everyone will be judged as an individual and where colour is just an act of nature which is either clear or dark. These uncompromising

events in Popi's life continue even in the council with Tjaart Cronje who continue to exhibit racial discrimination on her.

Mda's work is didactic in the sense that drives home a message needed for the integration of the people of today's South Africa. The most painful set back to reconciliation and rebuilding of a new nation is the loss of confidence of the once marginalised black population so early in the process of rebuilding the society. Baipehi's case is a symbol of the group who had hoped that the government will solve their problems immediately it came to power. The Baipehi became quickly disillusioned when the government takes a long time to do so. The worst of it all is that every shortcoming of the new government is still viewed from the perspective of white and black polarity. This is because whites and coloured consider themselves as the new sort of subalterns in the changed country.

Despite the struggle for a rainbow nation there are still many obstacles to this vision as can be seen in *The Madonna of Excelsior* Mda shows the kind of racist attitude which acts as a sort of stumbling block to the unity of the post-apartheid nation. When Popi goes to cash Viliki's cheque at the bank she becomes aware of the black and white polarity in South Africa.

Another strange thing was that the white customers did not join the one queue. They walked straight to the seller, who would immediately stop serving the black customer to attend to the white one. It was the same when Tjaart Cronje entered. He went straight to the head of the queue. [...] Tjaart Cronje did not see Popi at all. Just a row of faces that were not white, but now permitted to share the same queue with white people (P. 153).

This implies that the total unity of the new South Africa is flawed by problems some of which are residues of the past like in the above case. Mda's vision here is to put

into question a non-racial society which is the cornerstone of the new political order. The problem which seems to arise is how total is the reconciliation process and the desire for a united society where there is still dissatisfaction across racial divide. Mda brings this out in *The Madonna of Excelsior* through Sekatle:

He had a particular distaste for coloured girls. He knew a lot about them, too. His own sister had two such children. A girl of Popi's age, born of the Excelsior 19 day. Another girl born years later, for miscegenation had continued unabated after the Excelsior 19 case. He had never forgiven his sister for bringing shame into his home. (PP. 114-115).

Sekatle's discrimination against his sister's children is on the basis of the fact that they look different. He discriminates against them because he considers them as inferior. This hatred for fellow blacks is what makes Mda to wonder aloud about this racial prejudice. Mda is against the fact that Sekatle hates coloured girls. This is because in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, he advocates a society where people have to respect each other regardless of their skin colour.

When we look at the relationship between the blacks and the coloured in South Africa, we realise that the coloured have been the most oppressed. This is evident in the socio-political reality of South Africa and other Southern African states. In South Africa during the days of apartheid, the coloured were seen as non-human. During this period, whites were against blacks and in other states blacks were against blacks. This class system reduced the "other" to an animal. Differences were not only noted between blacks and whites but amongst whites too. This is evident in *The Madonna of Excelsior* through Dukakis and the Afrikaners in Excelsior:

[...] the Afrikaner community kept Dukakis at polite distance. [...] Until one night when his son, Ari was caught necking in Dukakis old strudebaker with

Jacomina, the Reverend Bornman's daughter. The Afrikaners of Excelsior, led by the domineer himself, could not hide their outrage. They said Greek boys had no right to smooch with Afrikaner meisies. Greeks were not white enough. They were no different from the Portuguese. Greeks were wit kaffirs. They put it to him frankly that the likes of him were no longer welcomed in Excelsior. The Dukakis' family had, had to pack up and leave (P. 76).

Each race living in this multiracial space identifies only with its kind. The image presented here shows how segregation is part and parcel of the Afrikaner society. There are things that Greeks who form part of this society should not do. The fact that they are Greeks makes the white people to ignore them. Because of the racist situation, the Dukakis's are forced by the Afrikaners who are people of the same skin colour, to leave Excelsior. This highlights the issue of otherness that is constructed among whites and whites.

When Reverend François Bornman one of the five white men who are charged for violating of the Immorality Act is accused for violating the Immorality Act, he attempts to kill himself. Instead of him accepting his lecherous attitude, he instead blames it on the black women. To him black women are agents of the devil who have tempted him to go against the laws of adultery and miscegenation which he preached obedience to these laws.

The narrator tells us that:

It was the work of the devil, he said. The devil had sent black women to tempt him and to move him away from the path of righteousness. The devil had always used the black female to tempt the Afrikaner. It was a battle that was raging within individual Afrikaner men [...] The devil made the Afrikaner to covertly covert the black woman while publicly detesting her [...] The devil had weakened his heart, making it open to temptation. And he had made things

worse for himself in the eyes of the Almighty by attempting to take his own life (P. 87).

The whites see the non-whites as a source of ill-luck. This citation demonstrates that Reverend Father Bornman is a racist. The colonial mentality is what has brought forth this denigration. These black women are not only exploited sexually but are also considered as devils. By misrepresenting black women as devils, Reverend Bornman tries to sustain his white superiority.

The new South Africa exists against the background of apartheid's legacy that unfortunately exists in a continuum. This can be seen in the argument between Viliki and Adam de Vries.

Viliki [...] remarked that Adam de Vries was the kind of African who viewed himself as superior to other Africans. Otherwise why had he perpetuated discrimination based on race?" "It was for the good of everyone," screamed Adam de Vries. "[...] All we wanted to do was to guide the black man to civilization." "Which is what you continue to do today, hey?" said Viliki sarcastically [...] "If we fold our arms and do nothing, you will blame us. You must admit it, Viliki. You need us. A black man's way of thinking is that [...] He wants the white man to guide him. Or even create a job for him." (Mda, P. 252).

De Vries gives the impression that all that is white is good and the other is bad. Mda seems to decentre the white South Africa's history of superiority. He wants to recreate an identity for the black South African. The author is trying to redress the imbalances of some falsehoods that have been perpetrated by the white South Africans. From what Mda says, we learn that his efforts in his works is first and foremost to reiterate the fact that the

black South Africans should take the responsibility to redress the historical misrepresentation that has been said and written about them.

In an article by Njabulo Ndebele entitled “Memory, Metaphor, and Triumph of Narrative”, the author writes, “What seems to have happened is that the passage of time which brought forth our freedom has given legitimacy and authority to previously silent voices” (Ndebele, 2000, p. 20). From Ndebele’s view, it appears that he, like Mda feels that the black people need to tell and retell their past. This is because they seem to hold that what is said about their past is distorted. So it is only in retelling their stories that they can assert their identity. Mda attempts to correct the falsehood that had been perpetrated by the whites on the blacks.

In Sekatle’s campaign for the local elections that were coming in a few months’ time, he never forgot to mention that the Pule siblings had sold out to the whites. That Excelsior was cursed with a white mayor almost six years after liberation because of their vote. The perceived friendship between the Pule siblings and de Vries’s family was frowned upon not because of de Vries’s history and political pedigree, but because they were white (P. 242).

Apartheid has strongly marked the history of South Africa and it is difficult for South Africans to forget it. This becomes a pillar for the construction of the future. Just like the blacks who frown at the relationship between de Vries’ family and the Pule siblings, the whites too like Johannes Smit and Tjaart Cronje are not happy about their relationship.

The likes of Tjaart Cronje and Johannes Smit said that Adam de Vries was Viliki’s puppet. It was not enough that his party had sold out the Afrikaner, Adam de Vries was now dancing to the tune of the blacks who were taking the country down to the sewer. Otherwise what would an Afrikaner lawyer have in



common with an unschooled township boy? [...]We put them down to the old love affair between black people and Afrikaners that the English found so irritating. Even at the height of apartheid, blacks preferred dealing with Afrikaners to the English-speaking South Africans (P. 223).

From the above excerpt, we deduce that Mda's fiction is a kind of redemption. His society is void of any human conflict. Even if there is any, he eliminates the individuals who want to obstruct human progress. Mda here is conscious of Dorothy Driver's view in *Black Women's Writing* who says:

Using writing as some kind of shrine to go to some means of spiritual survival, Head made a home for a self out of what she saw as Botswana's potential to be a cohesive whole. Her ideal community where the past is recalled in the present with the sense of continuing a secure future [...] and not identified and thus separated in terms of class and race. (P. 166).

The *Madonna of Excelsior* is a description of life in the new South Africa at the backdrop of the legacies of the now collapsed apartheid period. The novel's point of departure is based on the Immorality Act of the apartheid era which forbade sexual relationships between Blacks and whites even though the policy could not totally stop that from happening as villages in South Africa were full of children of mixed races. It is based on a historical fact that took place during the apartheid period of 1971 when interracial sexual relationships were forbidden by the law. Here we see Niki, her mixed coloured race daughter and her black son unite to liberate South Africa from the local base.

Mda's vision is based on educating and conscientising people on the need to renounce and reject the apartheid system of government. I propose that the apartheid society should be replaced with a society where brotherliness and togetherness would be the order of the day. Brotherliness should overcome racial and ethnic barriers because no

human being is completely good or bad. I consider *The Madonna of Excelsior* as a portrayal of shared cultural history of an Afrikaner community and a black community that live side by side. They are said to have almost the same cultural history because of the re-enactment of the Immorality Act and subsequent miscegenation, which bring them together since a group of white men and black women are charged with the violation of the said law. Hence, Mda traces the thirty year history of South Africa through his characters by bringing out the issues of racial identity, rape and revenge.

From this perspective therefore one can say that everything in the new South Africa especially the shortcoming of the new government is still viewed from the perspective of white and black polarity. This is because the whites and the coloured now considered themselves as the new sort of subalterns in the changed country.

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